

**A Suggested Guide
to the
Special Education,
Prereferral Process
for
Bilingual Learners**

**Peter Aladjem
Title VII M.O.D.E.L.S Project
Salem Public Schools
Salem, Massachusetts**

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Much research has been done about the need for appropriate identification and placement of bilingual learners with special needs. Often, bilingual learners find themselves over represented in special education programs or under represented when what are truly special needs are over looked and considered to be simply second language acquisition issues. How, then, do we sort out the real issues facing a bilingual learner with potential special needs?

Much thoughtful work has been done on what a well designed, prerefferal process might look like. This document has been created with those insights in mind. The hope is that it may be a helpful tool which can help steer that process. Schools and systems should be encouraged to revise the procedures according to their own needs and unique programs.

I wish to thank many authors, for much of this Guide is borrowed directly from their texts. I wish to thank Celeste Roseberry-McKibbin for selections from her work, Multicultural Students with Special Needs, Academic Communications Associates, 1995, pp.127 and 217. I also wish to thank S.B. Garcia and A.A. Ortiz for their flow chart, Preventing Inappropriate Placements of Language Minority Students in Special Education: A Prerefferal Model, 1988 (June), *FOCUS*, Occasional Papers in Bilingual Education, p.3, a publication of The National Clearinghouse on Bilingual Education.

Introduction

This document is designed to assist with the steps that are taken before a student is referred for special services and testing. It is to be used each time a bilingual student is being considered for special services. The goal is to greatly increase the accuracy of our placements, to help sort out the confusing similarities between what are normal, second language acquisition and cultural transition issues and those which are genuinely special needs issues which need to be addressed.

Far greater input is needed from bilingual parents, teachers and specialists at this level to better address this concern. This procedure also reflects current research which embraces a team approach that uses multiple measures and indicators and a strong understanding of second language development. The 'spirit' of these guidelines is also important and the more this document is read and used, the greater that spirit will become.

Recommendations On The Use Of This Prereferral Process

Much work has gone into creating this document, however, it has not been significantly field tested. My recommendation is that people work with this document both critically and creatively to figure out how to best put it to use. You may wish to reword, revise, restructure and recreate what you see. My hope is that the manual and the concepts presented prove to be a useful resource that you may use and transform to meet your own needs and styles.

In general, I have three recommendations on how it may be used.

- 1) You may wish to use this document to help you think about and examine the existing prereferral process that you have. Questions and concepts would, therefore, be more rhetorical in nature to help assess the kinds of resources and practices that you currently use. In this case, you might think about the guide as a tool for assessing what you do, rather than as an actual manual to be used with actual students.
- 2) You may wish to use the manual as a starting point from which to create your own process for your school or district. Then rewording, revising, researching and recreating this will become necessary.
- 3) If you are sufficiently pleased with the manual as a whole, you could begin to field test it with a limited number of students to see if it improves your prereferral process and to take note of what changes you would make to the guide in the future.

Please send questions, recommendations or examples of how this has been of use in your district to:

Peter Aladjem 24 Lanark Road, Arlington, MA 02476

Specific suggestions for the team about how to proceed

1) References to 'the team' are to the newly constituted Prereferral Team created with these procedures. (see section #2, Team Members)

2) At the actual implementation level, we suggest the following:

Before the prereferral team convenes, the classroom teacher uses:

- Attachment A (Have these been observed?)
- Attachment B (Have these been attempted?)
- Prereferral flow chart (At the end - Preventing Inappropriate Placements...)

At the prereferral meeting, the findings of the classroom teacher should be presented and considered. Has the classroom teacher noted many of the indicators from Attachment A? If so, the learner may have a special need to consider. Has the teacher attempted to make some interventions that would benefit a special needs, bilingual learner as in Attachment B? What were the results? Have all members of the team considered how the student would look if assessed using the prereferral flow chart?

The results of using these two attachments and the prereferral flow chart will be considered by the whole team. Then they will begin to complete the attached Check - Off List of Prereferral Considerations .

**Check - Off List of Prereferral Considerations
for the Assessment of Potential and Misdiagnosed Disabilities in
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students**

I) Prereferral Process Selection

Has a prereferral process been selected, amended or created for your school or district which is specifically designed for the unique needs of bilingual learners?

Has your team documented the steps you have taken and what the results of each step have been?

II) Team Members

Have bilingual specialists played a central role in selecting members of the team?

Do team members start with an assumption that the problem is a disability or that it results from being a second language learner?

Do team members possess sufficient knowledge of the second language acquisition process? If so, does this knowledge genuinely impact on the outcome of decisions or are the members who possess this information marginalized?

Do team members possess sufficient knowledge about qualitative forms of assessment- such as performance assessments - which reveal the processes, thinking and competencies of unique individuals? If so, are these measures being used significantly by the team?

Do individual team members believe in cultural assimilation or in the co-existence of cultures which are valued equally?

Do team members demonstrate a personal interest in learning about the cultures of the students involved?

III) Disability Observed in First and Second Languages

Has the disability been observed in the student's first and second languages? (If it is *not* present in the first language, it is not a disability, but a second language acquisition issue.)

Has the assessment for a disability been conducted in the student's first language? If not, why not? (As required by IDEA.)

Will special education services be given in the student's dominant language? If not, why not?

IV) Home, Family and Community

Has the team determined which delays are the result of the learner's cultural transition into the United States and American school experiences?

Have school personnel made home visits to conduct ethnographic interviews to learn about the student's home life and the role of the parents?

Have classroom teachers been maintaining a two-way dialogue (not monologue) around strategies that both teachers and families can be using?

Are parents actively participating in the prereferral team meetings and treated as knowledgeable members with unique insights and contributions?

Has the team acquired extensive background information on the student and her/his history?

Has counseling for the student and/or family been considered if appropriate?

Have any community organizations or non-school professionals been consulted about their ideas and advice or about how to coordinate efforts and services?

Does the student appear in need of any medical or nutritional

counseling or services?

V) Instruction and Classroom-Based Issues

Have classroom teachers noted what questionable behaviors are occurring? [See Attachment A, from McKibbon (1995).]

Have classroom teachers modified their instruction and classrooms to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students? [See, for example, Attachment B, from McKibbon (1995)]

Have the input and background information from previous teachers and schools been sought?

Has the classroom teacher tried to use a classroom para-professional to assist the student?

Has the classroom teacher experimented with assigning a class-buddy to the student (preferably with a similar language background) for some or selected activities?

Has the teacher found any school personnel or any formal or informal role models for the student with whom to bond and communicate?

VI) Standardized Testing and Assessment

Are the tests being given in the student's first language? If not, why not?

Is there an assumption that a mere translation of the test is sufficient to make it appropriate for the content that is being used?

If given in English, have any modifications been made because the test is being given in the student's second language?

Have the tests been examined for linguistic and cultural bias relative to the student?

Has the norming group been examined to see if it is appropriate for the student involved?

Have any accommodations been made in the testing scenario for the student because of her/his different experiences with standardized tests?

VII) Alternative Assessment Sources

Has data from non-standardized sources been sought and considered?

What insights were yielded by these sources (i.e. samples of student work over time, data from work in both first and second languages work, portfolios, journals, projects, etc.)?

Works Cited

1) Source: Roseberry-McKibbin, Celeste. Multicultural Students with Special Language Needs. Oceanside, CA. Academic Communication Associates. 1995. p156 .
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2) Source: Garcia, S.B. and Ortiz, A.A. (1988, June). Preventing Inappropriate Placements of Language Minority Students in Special Education: A Prerefferal Model, p.3 , FOCUS.
Washington, D.C.: Occasional Papers in Bilingual Education,
The National Clearinghouse on Bilingual Education.
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Student's Name_____

Notes related to the use of the "Check Off List" used above:

Strengths of recommended procedures:

Weaknesses of recommended procedures:

Attachment A

Note: The classroom teacher will use this form before a team meeting to learn if any of the behaviors have been observed. It will then be presented and discussed at the team meeting.

1. Difficulty in learning language at a normal rate, even with special assistance in both languages.
2. Deficits in vocabulary.
3. Short mean length of utterance.
4. Communication difficulties at home.
5. Communication difficulties when interacting with peers from a similar background.
6. Auditory processing problems (e.g., poor memory poor comprehension).
7. Lack of organization, structure, and sequence in spoken and written language; difficulty conveying thoughts.
8. Slow academic achievement despite adequate academic English proficiency.
9. Family history of special education/learning difficulties.
10. Slower development than siblings (as per parent report).
11. Heavy reliance on gestures rather than speech to communicate.
12. Inordinate slowness in responding to questions.
13. General disorganization and confusion.
14. Difficulty paying attention.
15. The need for frequent repetition and prompts during instruction.
16. The need for a more structured program of instruction than peers.
17. Difficulties in using appropriate grammar and sentence structure.
18. Difficulties in the use of precise vocabulary Uses words such as *stuff things, you know*, etc..
19. Inappropriate social use of language (e.g., interrupts frequently digresses from topic, is insensitive to the needs or communication goals of conversational partners, cannot stay on the topic of discussion, cannot take turns in conversation).
20. Poor sequencing skills. Communication is disorganized, incoherent, and leaves listener confused.
21. Overall communication skills that are substantially poorer than those of peers.

Source: Roseberry-Mckibbin, Celeste. Multicultural Students with Special Language Needs.
Oceanside, CA. Academic Communication Associates. 1995.
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Attachment B

The classroom teacher should attempt the following interventions that might benefit a bilingual, special needs learner and present the results at the team meeting.

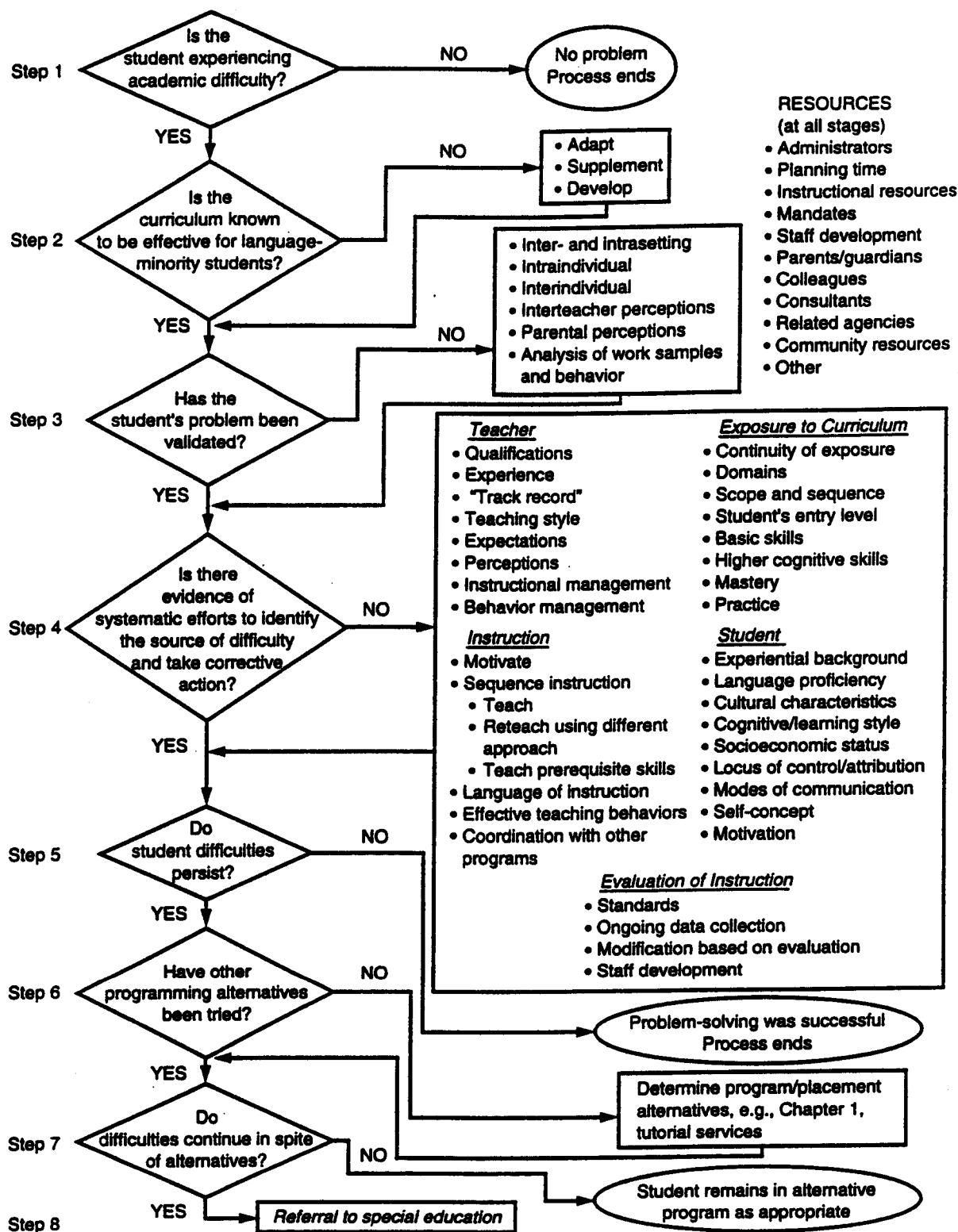
WORKING WITH LINGUISTICALLY AND CULTURALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS: THE INTERVENTIONIST'S SELF-EVALUATION CHECKLIST

Do I...

1. Use a multimodal approach to teaching material?
2. Review previous material?
3. Make input comprehensible by slowing down, pausing, and speaking clearly?
4. Rephrase and restate information?
5. Check frequently for comprehension?
6. Focus on teaching meaning rather than focusing on correct grammar?
7. Avoid putting students on the spot by demanding that they talk immediately?
8. Give extra time for processing information?
9. Attempt to reduce students' anxieties and give them extra attention when possible?
10. Encourage students' use and development of their primary language?
11. Encourage students to interject their own cultural experiences and backgrounds into learning situations?
12. Expose all my students to multicultural activities and materials on a regular basis?
13. Include parents and community members from different cultural backgrounds in my teaching?

Almost Always	Some-times	Very Rarely	Never

Source: Roseberry-McKibbin, Celeste. Multicultural Students with Special Language Needs.
 Oceanside, CA. Academic Communication Associates. 1995.
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Source: Garcia, S.B. and Ortiz, A.A. (1988, June). *Preventing Inappropriate Placements of Language Minority Students in Special Education: A Prerefferal Model*, p.3, FOCUS. Washington, D.C.: Occasional Papers in Bilingual Education, The National Clearinghouse on Bilingual Education.
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